

[R. W. Smith]

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Miller

Folklore Folkstuff - Rangelore

Howard County

District 18

Mrs. J. O. Miller—P. W.

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Page 1. S - 241 LIFE ON THE LONG S RANCH IN 1886

As related by R. W. Smith, pioneer rancher 67 years of age.

In a letter to Mrs. J. O. miller, Filed Worker.

September 14, 1936.

I began work on the Long S Ranch in 1886, August 15, just 50 years ago. Most of the country was open range, or at least it was from Sweetwater to El Paso. We scarcely slept in a house for three years. We branded about 15,000 cattle such year. About November 15, Mr. Gus O'Keefe, the manager of the ranch, paid off 20 men, one had worked 5 years, another 7 years and one had been on the ranch for 15 years. As he called each man into his office and paid them off we waited for our call. When he called me into his office, of course I expected to get my time, but to my surprise, he said, "Do you want to work this

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winter?" Being so astonished, I calmly replied "Yes", but couldn't understand why he was offering me a job, a lad of 17 years, and only been on the ranch three months, when he was letting some of the old hands go. He said, "I'm going to keep four men and I want them to Camp on the Range and rope and brand calves wherever they find them." And that just suited me and the rest of the boys, putting it mildly, for we were thrilled over the work.

We would stay 4 or 5 days in one place then move to another place. The three other pardn'rs have gone on the Last Roundup. They were [C.A.?] Goldsmith, Walker Burney and [??]. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

Mr. Gus O'Keefe sent me with the 20 men he laid off to Big Spring in a wagon. When we got about half way to town, one of the men said: "[Leas?] kill that damn kid and turn those mules loose and let them go home." They had got some whiskey and was pretty drunk, and I was scared [??]. I got as close to the Indian Cook as possible, thinking he would help me if they decided to kill me. Well, I sure was glad to see town and unload that bunch 2 of locoed cowhands.

In the fall of [1886?], we were camped between Snyder and Colorado City. One night we had several hundred head of cattle under [?] herd : we had caught , saddled and staked our horses for the night, so as to have them when it came our turn to stand guard. When about good dark one of the horses got tangled up in his rope and broke loose, and away it went with the saddle; the owner said, "Go, I hope the antelopes get you before morning." After a few minutes study, the young man said, "Pa, does antelopes eat horses?"

In August of 1887, Mr. O'Keefe sent me to watch the western boundary of the range, which was the [?] side of the old C Ranch, owned by Nelson Morris of Chicago. I stayed 30 or 40 days riding line and while there I [?] for [?] [??] watch. I think the spring must have been three feet long from the time it took me to wind it, and you could hear it for ten steps. [?]

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the first night I was with the man, we went on camp drive. Now a camp drive is like this, each man ties his slicker on his saddle and puts two pieces of steak and two biscuits in the middle picket and leaves the wagon after an early supper, say 4 or 5 o'clock. We ride out ten or fifteen miles, unsaddle, stake our horses, [?] slickers and saddle blankets for a bed and use saddle for a pillow. No one in the crowd has a watch and I didn't want them to know I had one, so I go off as far as I could to keep the boys from noticing anything in particular. After I lay down, my watch ticked so loud, I dug a hole in the ground and covered it with dirt. But when they quit talking, s short time, one of them said: "I hear a watch ticking." Another said, "So do I." Then the third said, "[??" do you have a watch?" Well I had to own up to being in possession of a watch. The next morning, they had to see the watch and examine how it was made, so after we tore it up to see inside of it, we could not put it back together, so that was the last of my \$1.00 watch.

After we had spent the night on our saddle blankets, we would [?] our horses, scatter out a mile a-part, drive cattle back to the wagon. Round them up, cut [?] head of cows and calves, brand the calves and turn them loose. 3 Some times we would cut some steers or fat cows from the herd to ship.

When I used the word "cut" it means to separate the cows from the big herd, which usually is 1,000 to 4000 head. If we could get the cattle to the pin we would take them there, if not, we would have about four men to hold the bunch while one would rope and drag a cow to the fire and four men bull-dog it, tie it and brand it. One man is used to tally; this work uses about ten men.

I will tell you how we [?] worked on the general work; that means men from different ranches for 50 to 200 miles north. One man from each ranch, I was sent on what we called the Colorado work in September 1897, there was 25 men with the wagon I worked with, which was [9R?] wagon. Billie [?] Kendricks was wagon boss. We would cut our cattle together, kept all the different brands in one herd. Every evening we would brand calves, one or tow two men would ride in the herd and catch a calf , drag it to the fire and call out

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the brand its mother was wearing, if a Long S, it would be called, if 9R that would be sung to the man and so on for all the brands were different. As the calves were branded, one man with a tally book would mark one beside that brand.

We made our last Roundup that year at [??], east of Big Spring. Then each man cut the cattle, worked and took them back to the ranch they belonged to. Some times, two or three was going the same way, in that case they throw their cuts together and drive the herd to the respective ranches as far as possible. We had 250 head.

At the last roundup, Tom Wilson of Big Lake and I cut our cattle together, he was working maybe south of Big Spring about 15 miles. As we drove the herd along the dusty covered road with tired eyes but with the song on our hearts, we leisurely sang: "Rye whiskey, Rye whiskey, O, give me Rye whiskey, or I'll die." However neither of us drank.

I guess the next thing is a bear story. I never was much to tell stories but I used to tell lies, but I have quit that.

Here, is a bear story. There had been several stories told when one of 4 the boys spoke up and said. "That's nothing; about ten years ago I roped a bear and he turned, grabbed the rope, began to come toward me, and I saw he was pulling my horse toward him, so I jumped off the horse and he kept coming to the horse. When he got close enough to the horse he jumped in the saddle and lit out with my horse and saddle. I have never seen him [sic] and that's been ten years ago."

Several of the boys began to sing Rye Straw, for that was the song they sung when they did not believe anything.

The men I worked with was modest men like Mr. J. W. Carpenter, a parde' of mine , and didn't tell many stores. If they did I have forgotten them, as I have been a Christain 39 years and don't think much along the old ways of life.